



Translocated making in experimental collaborative design projects

Ashley Hall PhD Thesis 2013

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of doctor of philosophy.

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Cover: Nirona stool, research design Ashley Hall, Industrial design Matthew Kavanagh, legs made by Bhavik Bhavchaya, of Nirona and seat by Yunas Bhai of Bhuj, Rann of Katchchh, Gujarat, India, 2012.

For Clarence Hall 1936-2008

Acknowledgements

This research has been conducted with the generous and enthusiastic support of a global range of individuals, partners and institutions without which this investigation would not have been possible. I would like to thank Professor Charles Rice from the University of Technology Sydney & Kingston University for his dedicated, detailed and enthusiastic supervision during our meetings at the British Library in London. To Professor Tom Barker my initial supervisor formerly at UTS and now Professor of Digital Futures at the Ontario College of Art & Design Canada who encouraged my interest in Translocated Making and assisted in my application for a vice chancellor's scholarship based on the initial doctoral discussion we had when working together in Ghana on the eArtisans project. To Professor Miles Pennington at the Royal College of Art's Innovation Design Engineering programme for allowing me the flexibility to engage in this research alongside my academic work and for that key conversation on the structure of the workshop at NID. Professor Ranulph Glanville, visiting research professor at the Royal College of Art for his encouragement and research worldview. Professor Peter Childs at Imperial College has been a research mentor through our collaborative publications and regular wide ranging conversations on design thinking. The highly skilled and generous craftsmen Luhar Umar Husen, Bhavik Bhavchaya and Yunas Bhai in Nirona and Bhuj, Rann of Kutch. To the designers Matthew Kavanagh and Cairn Young for supplying the 'secret' design concepts for the Kutch collaborations. I would like to thank all the staff and students at NID in Ahmedabad with whom I worked on the Translocated Making workshop and in particular to Professors Praveen Nahar, Rama Krishna Rao and MP Ranjan for taking time to discuss our research interests and for supporting my accommodation and connections to local makers through the visiting research fellowship. Isha Pimpalkhare for her translation, logistics and research coordination skills. Meera Goradia and Dipesh Bhai at Khamir, Abhay Mangaldas at the House of MG, Arvind Chowda and Gramshree at the Ghandi Ashram, Omprakash Kothari at All-win/Copperking, Naim Mohammed Shaikh and Franklin Kisi for Industrial connections in Ahmedabad. To Aanya Roennfeldt director of the DAB research gallery for supporting the exhibition of my doctoral works during Sydney design week 2013. My mother Jean Hall and brother Julian Hall for his kind financial support for my travel and project costs in India and finally all the generous support, enthusiasm and interest for my research at UTS and especially for the vice chancellors scholarship and conference funding which made this study possible.

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Translocated making in experimental collaborative design projects

Abstract

This thesis examines the activity of designing and making across geographical distances. Through critical reflection on the author's own design practice, and the initiation of new collaborative design projects, the thesis develops and tests the concept of translocated making. Translocated making is explored as a form of production where activity, influence, media and understanding are shared across multiple locations, both physically and virtually.

The author's own design practice is situated and analysed in the context of how the manufacturing possibilities of mature western markets have developed since the 1990s. With the rise of digital technologies, greater degrees of interaction and collaboration between designer and manufacturer have been enabled; however, it is found that the effects of geographical and cultural distance on designing and making have not been systematically researched, nor understood from the perspective of the designer as creative agent.

Drawing on theories of cultural interaction, and in particular Appadurai's theory of suffixscapes, the thesis sets out a framework for experimenting with and analysing the effects of cultural and geographical difference on designing and making. Collaboration across distance is established as a key mode of designing and making, bringing to light the effects of difference in design outcomes. Gujarat in India is the location for a series of design projects in urban and remote locations. These are investigated through designing research and researching through design methods.

New knowledge is articulated through the way in which the design projects allow for the testing and reflection upon theories of cultural interaction. The experimental design methods employed in the projects show how exchanging differences through collaboration in digital and analogue media can create new artefacts with hybrid cultural values.

The value of this research for designers and makers in advanced and developing economies is through helping them to understand the possibilities of collaboration across geographical distance. For academics and researchers the value lies in critiquing and further developing practice-based design research methods, and in exploring the longer-term strategic, creative and cultural changes that globalisation and digital technologies are bringing to all forms of design and manufacture.